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DENNIS RODMAN SERENADES NORTH KOREAN LEADER KIM JONG-UN ON HIS BIRTHDAY PAGE 5

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Blind man's case vs. cab company being investigated

Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.
Mike Simmonds says his guide dog was met with resistance by Comfort Cabs

JACOB MORGAN
jacob.morgan@metronews.ca

After two unsuccessful mediation attempts, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission is investigating Mike Simmonds' complaint against Comfort Cabs in Saskatoon.

Simmonds charges that on three separate occasions this past fall, the taxi service was unaccommodating of his need to have a guide dog, Graham, with him at all times.

"I've had apologies, (but) an apology doesn't correct the problem," said Simmonds. "What I've been asking for from the beginning is education and awareness."

This all began around the end of September, when Simmonds said he called a cab and was told he would have to wait for a pet-friendly vehicle.

He reported this incident the following morning and said he was assured "that all of their taxis are guide dog- and service dog-friendly."

However, in November he again called for a ride to the airport and said he was met with hostility from the driver, who suggested Simmonds ask for a larger car.

While the driver accepted the fare, Simmonds said he could sense the tension, which he said he learned was due to "religious reasons."

Just a few days later, Simmonds said he was made to wait with Graham in the freezing cold one last time before he took the matter to the Human Rights Commission.

Now, he said, a growing number of supporters have contacted him from across Canada and the United States.

"I've got a list that I'm going to be handing off to the investigator," he said.

Cliff Kowbel, operations manager with Comfort Cabs, said he could not find any evidence of mistreatment.

"Nobody refused him," said Kowbel.

At one point, Kowbel said, a gift certificate to any taxi service in the city was offered to Simmonds, but he said the olive branch was denied.

"I don't think we're going to offer him anything in the future," said Kowbel. "We're going to dig our heels in now and see what happens."

Mike Simmonds with his guide dog, Graham. Simmonds has filed a human rights complaint against Comfort Cabs for not being forthcoming in their accommodation of his service animal in their vehicles.
JACOB MORGAN/METRO

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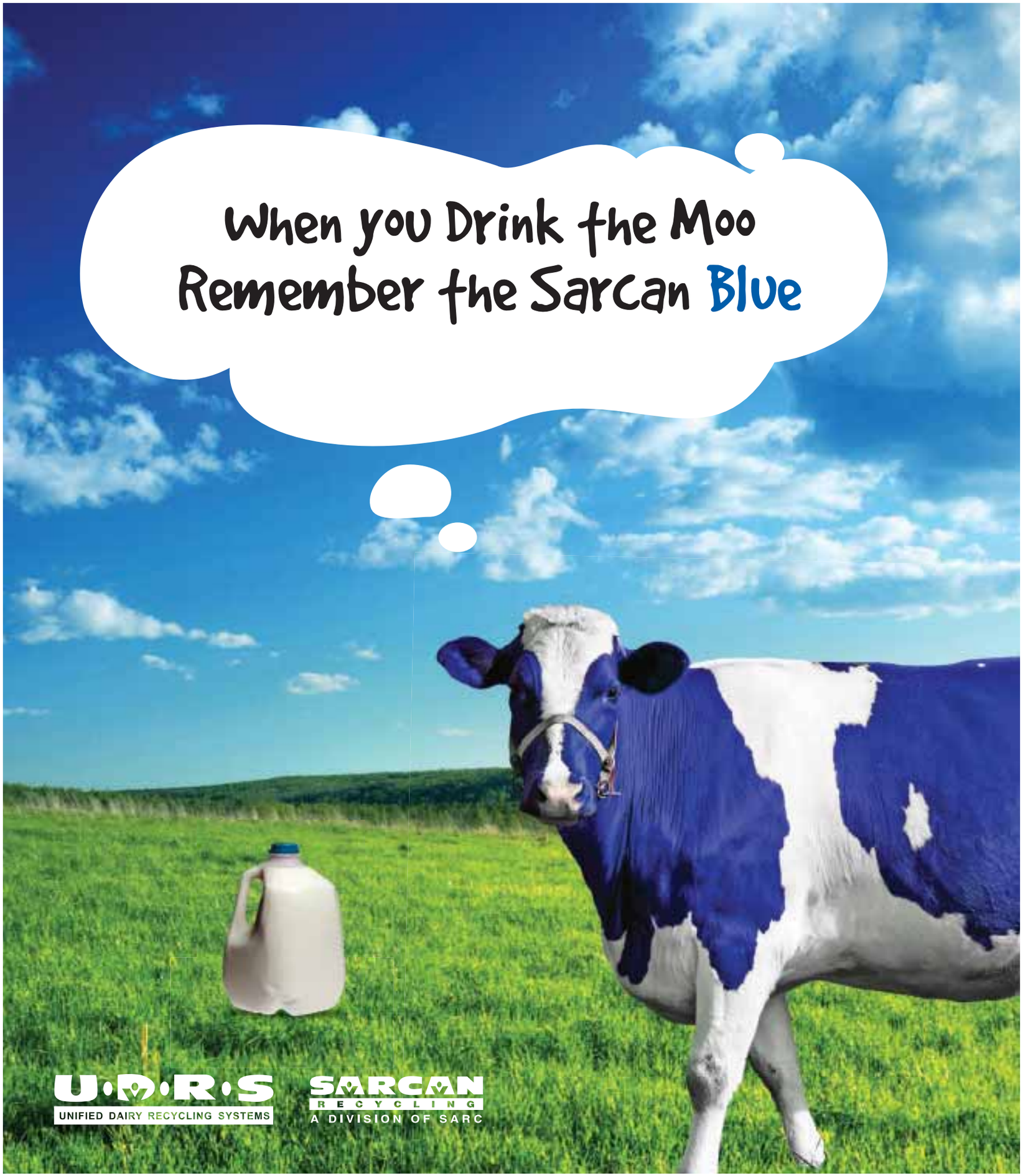
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Circle Drive North Bridge

Saskatoon woman recalls how she survived after her car plunged into icy river

A Saskatoon woman says she is grateful to be alive after her car went off a bridge and plunged into the icy South Saskatchewan River.

Breanna Pegg was on her way to lunch with her cousin Dec. 30 travelling east on the Circle Drive North Bridge when she lost control of her car and went up a snowbank.

The 23-year-old nurse had crossed the span many times before, but this time her car ended up in the river.

"I remember realizing my car was going over the barrier into the river. I remember just thinking: 'Oh my God, I'm going to die,"' she told radio station CKOM.

"When I first came to, I remember thinking: 'Oh, I'm alive, I'm so relieved!"'

Pegg's survival instincts had kicked in as her car had up-ended and begun to sink. The power windows didn't work and she noticed a hole in the bottom corner of the smashed windshield, so she crawled out onto the hood. She slowly lowered herself into the water and swam over to the edge, where she was able to pull herself onto the ice.

Pegg was taken to hospital. Her car was left in the river, where it will stay until spring.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/CKOM

Crime investigation

Police make arrest in string of taxi armed robberies

Police have arrested a 27-year-old Saskatoon man in connection with several taxi armed robberies.

The robberies, which involved the suspect hiring a cab and then stealing cash from the driver at knife point, occurred between Nov. 5 and Jan. 4. None of the drivers were injured.

The suspect was brought into custody following an investigation by the Saskatoon Police Service's general investigation section. He is set to appear in provincial court on Jan. 9 — charged with six counts of armed robbery and one count of attempted armed robbery. METRO

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Saskatchewan real estate market off to strong start

Housing hot in 2014. Buyers gung-ho from the get-go, agent says

JACOB MORGAN
jacob.morgan@metronews.ca

The new year has begun with healthy activity in Saskatchewan's urban housing market, according to realtors in Saskatoon and Regina.

Susan Zwarych, an agent with Century 21, says she was receiving calls from interested buyers immediately after New Year's Day.

"I'm seeing a quicker start to the year than last year," said Zwarych, who runs the website SaskatoonRealty.com.

"Last year, things didn't pick up until late March, early April."

This, she said, is partly due to job opportunities and the region's economy.

Lynette Keyowski, manager of property information services with the Association of Regina Realtors, is equally optimistic about the market in the Queen City.

"We continue to have a buoyant economy and our population continues to grow," she said. "I think it's in a great place."

Although Keyowski said there was a drop of about 0.1 per cent in property values in Regina from November to December, she described it as a seasonal trend that isn't likely to continue.

She added that she is seeing the most action on homes between $350,000 and $450,000, and that some of the popular Regina neighbourhoods are Lakeridge, Glencairn and Glen Elm Park.

One of Saskatoon's most exciting areas in 2014, Zwarych said, is the Kensington neighbourhood in the west end.

"The nice thing with those builds going up is the city zoned them to have legal basement suites," Zwarych said.

"There was a need for that, especially with the cultural landscape changing in Saskatoon."

An upscale home on the market is seen on Wednesday on Wascana Mews in southeast Regina. The real estate sector in Saskatoon and Regina is seeing strong activity as 2014 begins. ROSS ROMANIUK/METRO IN REGINA

Families from other countries are immigrating to Canada, she noted, adding that such suites are necessary to accommodate them.

In 2013, Zwarych said, the hottest markets in the Saskatoon area were in Stonebridge with 272 transactions, Hampton Village with 252 and Willowgrove with 226.

Province on track to set new export record; potash on par with 2012

The president of a Saskatchewan export group says the province is on track to set all-time high records for exports.

Lionel LaBelle, president and CEO of the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, says exports surpassed $30.3 billion in the first 11 months of 2013, up 5.4 per cent from 2012.

In November alone, he says exports totalled $2.8 billion.

LaBelle told the John Gormley Live show (CJME-CKOM) that most people are wondering where the potash industry would land.

He says potash sales are on par with 2012.

LaBelle added that the real standout industry was agriculture.

"Our wheat exports to the end of October were $1.7 billion. Our canola exports were $3.5 billion," he said Wednesday.

"Our lentil business is up 70 per cent, our pea business is up 80 per cent to the end of October. When we get the November numbers in detail, we suspect that that particular trend will continue."

He said the manufacturing industry is ahead of 2012 and the lumber industry has also taken a jump.

"I don't think I'm stepping out of line when I suggest that if you look at December numbers over the last four or five years there has always been strong representation," LaBelle said.

"I'm quite confident that we will eclipse $33 billion without an issue at all."

LaBelle said Saskatchewan's energy industry and food industry are parallel at around the $11 billion mark. Those industries are followed by potash, manufacturing and uranium.

"Those five would add up to about 90 per cent of our exports," he said.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/CKOM/CJME

Road safety. U.K. survey shows many men have fallen asleep at the wheel

Driving tired carries similar risks to driving drunk, but, according to a new British survey, sleeping at the wheel is common, with men being by far the worst offenders.

In the survey of 1,000 drivers, British road safety charity Brake found that 45 per cent of men admitted "microsleeps" of up to 30 seconds while driving. The figure for women was 22 per cent. A further 14 per cent of male drivers have slept for longer periods behind the wheel, while just two per cent of women had done the same.

An estimated one-in-six fatal road crashes result from tiredness. These typically involve vehicles veering off the road or a driver failing to brake.

"Men are much more likely to take risks at the wheel, such as setting off on journeys without enough sleep, or trying to push through if they feel drowsy," Ellen Booth, senior campaigns officer at Brake, told Metro. "We see this trend across the board when it comes to road safety."

Booth believes "cultural and biological" factors explain why men take more risks. More than 90 per cent of those convicted for dangerous driving in Britain are male, while a recent U.S. study found that men caused 80 per cent of crashes. Researchers are concerned that tiredness is adding to the trend.

Brake is calling for more education to ensure that drivers sleep enough and take regular breaks, as well as an audit of roads to guarantee rest areas. In the U.S., the state of New Jersey has gone further by making it a criminal offence to drive tired.

Another possible solution may come from technology, with devices in development that aim to keep drivers awake. KIERON MONKS/METRO WORLD NEWS IN LONDON

According to a new British survey, sleeping at the wheel is common, and men are by far the worst offenders. ISTOCK

PM defends rail safety record in wake of N.B. derailment

Derailed train cars burn in Plaster Rock, N.B., Wednesday. A CN freight train carrying crude oil and propane derailed Tuesday night in a sparsely populated region of northwestern New Brunswick, leading to the evacuation of 150 people. It's at least the third such serious incident on North American rails since last July's deadly derailment in Lac-Mégantic, Que., that claimed 47 lives. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, speaking to reporters in Inuvik, N.W.T., Wednesday, defended his government's record on rail safety, saying the government has "vastly" increased rail safety and rail inspections. TOM BATEMAN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Fatal bird flu case surfaces in Alberta

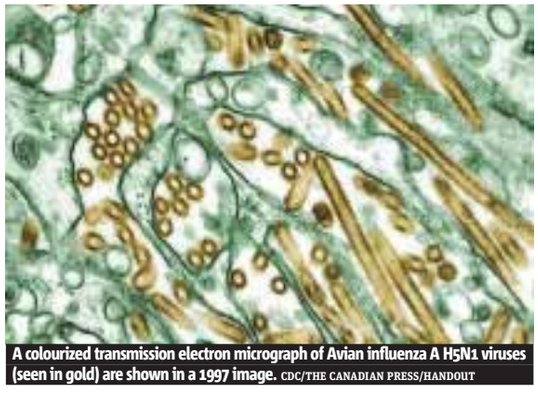
First in North America. Health officials assure public that incident was isolated, unrelated to seasonal flu and risk to public is small

Federal public health officials say a fatal human case of H5N1 bird flu has been reported in Canada, the first such case in North America.

Health Minister Rona Ambrose says the case, which was located in Alberta, was an isolated one and that the risk to the general public is small.

"The risk of getting H5N1 is very low," Ambrose told a hastily assembled news conference in Ottawa via conference call.

"This case is not part of the seasonal flu, which circulates in Canada every year."



A colourized transmission electron micrograph of Avian influenza A H5N1 viruses (seen in gold) are shown in a 1997 image. CDC/THE CANADIAN PRESS/HANDOUT

The H5N1 strain is unrelated to the seasonal flu outbreak, Ambrose added.

Health officials say the victim had travelled to China last month and was hospitalized after returning to Alberta on Jan. 1, then died two days later.

They say that while it remains unclear how the person contracted the virus, there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission.

"The health system did everything it could for this individual, and our thoughts are with the family at this time," Ambrose said.

Dr. James Talbot, Alberta's chief medical officer of health, said that family members of the victim are being monitored and treated with medication, noting that there's nothing to indicate they are sick.

"Public health has followed up with all close contacts of this individual and offered Tamiflu as a precaution," Talbot said.

"None of them have symptoms and the risk of developing symptoms is extremely low. Precautions for health-care staff were also taken as part of this individual's hospital treatment."

The World Health Organization says that as of mid-December, there had been 648 laboratory-confirmed human cases of H5N1 flu since 2003, reported from 15 countries. Of that total, 384 infections have been fatal.

In 2013, there were 38 worldwide cases of H5N1, 24 of which were fatal.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Florida

Police: DNA shows 2 women involved in slaying of Canadian couple

Police in Florida believe two women were involved in the killings of a Canadian couple one year ago.

David Pichosky, 71, and Rochelle Wise, 66, of Toronto were found dead by asphyxiation on Jan. 10, 2013, in their winter home. The DNA profiles of two females were found at the scene, said police Chief Dwayne Flournoy.

"The science tells us that there are two females that are involved in this homicide, at least two," he said Wednesday. "It's only a matter of time before we get our match, and we will get our match."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Changes implemented

'Mistake' that let protesters get close to PM has been fixed: RCMP

The RCMP says it has identified and fixed the "mistake" that allowed two climate-change protesters to walk onto a stage within touching distance of Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

However, the force isn't saying just what the mistake was or what specifically was done to prevent it from happening again.

RCMP Cpl. Lucy Shorey says in a statement that the force continues to review the incident, and it has implemented changes to ensure it doesn't happen again. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Solar flare. Sun delays space station supply run

A strong solar storm is interfering with the latest supply run to the International Space Station.

On the bright side, the orbiting lab has won a four-year extension, pushing its projected end-of-lifetime to at least 2024, a full decade from now.

"This is a big plus for us," said NASA's human exploration chief, Bill Gerstenmaier.

On Wednesday, Orbital Sciences Corp. delayed its space station delivery mission for the third time.

The company's unmanned rocket, the Antares, was set to blast off from Wallops Island, Virginia, with a capsule full of supplies and science experiments, including ants for an educational project. But several hours before Wednesday afternoon's planned flight, company officials took the unusual step of postponing the launch for fear solar radiation could doom the rocket.

In this Tuesday image, a giant cloud of solar particles explodes off the sun, which is obscured to show the atmosphere around it.

ESA/NASA-SOHO/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Orbital Sciences' chief technical officer, Antonio Elias, said solar particles might interfere with electronics equipment in the rocket and lead to a launch failure.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Taking the plunge

Giffords skydives to commemorate third anniversary of shooting

Gabrielle Giffords, the former congresswoman severely injured three years ago in a mass shooting, has made an impressive recovery, learned to walk again and founded a national political organization. On Wednesday, while others gathered for bell-ringing and flag-raising ceremonies, she marked the anniversary by skydiving.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Insane Clown Posse

Rap-metal duo sues U.S. Justice Department

The Insane Clown Posse sued the U.S. Justice Department on Wednesday over a 2011 FBI report that describes the rap-metal duo's devoted fans, the Juggalos, as a dangerous gang, saying the designation has tarnished reputations and hurt business.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed the lawsuit in Detroit federal court on behalf of the group. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

North Korean leader serenaded by Rodman

Basketball diplomacy. Former NBA player hopes to build connections with North Korea through the sport

Dennis Rodman sings Happy Birthday to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, seated above in the stands, before an exhibition basketball game at an indoor stadium in Pyongyang, North Korea, on Wednesday.

KIM KWANG HYON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dennis Rodman sang Happy Birthday to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un before leading a squad of former NBA stars in a friendly game Wednesday as part of his "basketball diplomacy" that has been criticized in the United States as naive and laughable.

Rodman dedicated the game to his "best friend" Kim, who along with his wife and other senior officials and their wives, watched from a special seating area. The capacity crowd of about 14,000 at the Pyongyang Indoor Stadium clapped loudly as Rodman sang a verse from the birthday song.

Rodman said he was honoured to be able to play the game in the North Korean capital and called the event "historic." Some members of the U.S. Congress, the NBA and human rights groups, however, say he has become a public relations tool for North Korea's government.

The government's poor human rights record and its threats to use nuclear weapons against rival South Korea and the United States have kept it a pariah state. Kim shocked the world in December by having his uncle, once considered his mentor, executed after being accused of a litany of crimes including corruption, womanizing, drug abuse and attempting to seize power.

Rodman, 52, has refused to address those concerns while continuing to forge a relationship with Kim, whose age has never been officially disclosed. The government did not say how old he turned Wednesday but he is believed to be in his early 30s.

To keep it friendly, the Americans played against the North Koreans in the first half, but split up and merged teams for the second half.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Held prisoner

Rodman refuses to help

The sister of a U.S. man imprisoned in North Korea says his family can't believe what Dennis Rodman said about him while on a basketball trip to celebrate the birthday of leader Kim Jong-un. Terri Chung told KOMO Radio in Seattle on Wednesday the family was appalled that someone in a position to help 45-year-old Kenneth Bae refuses to do so. Chung says Rodman may be hurting efforts to free her brother. Chung says it's clear Rodman "has no idea what he's talking about." In a CNN interview Tuesday, Rodman implied Bae may deserve his punishment.

Ontario. McMaster lab cracks genetic code of 1800s cholera bacteria

Canadian and American scientists have mapped the genetic blueprint of the cholera bacteria responsible for a 19th-century pandemic of the disease, cracking open a veritable medical time capsule to do so.

The researchers, led by the Ancient DNA Centre at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont., mined a postage stamp-sized piece of tissue taken from the preserved intestine of a Philadelphia man who died of cholera in 1849.

The work confirmed the suspicion that the outbreak — the second of seven cholera pandemics in history — was caused by what is known as the classical strain of the bacterium Vibrio cholera. Currently most cholera disease is triggered by another strain — El Tor — that displaced classical as the most common cause of illness in the 1960s.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Two websites to stop billing people to remove mug shots

Two Internet sites that make money by posting millions of mug shots of people who've been arrested have agreed to stop charging them to take down their photos as part of a settlement in a federal lawsuit.

The lawsuit came about after a number of complaints from people who said the websites were charging hundreds of dollars to remove the mug shots even if the cases against those arrested had been dropped.

The settlement in U.S. District Court in Toledo, Ohio, doesn't apply to all of the mug shot sites that can be found online, just two — BustedMugshots.com and MugshotsOnline.com.

Similar lawsuits have been filed in Florida, Illinois, and Pennsylvania while legislators in Georgia and Utah have passed laws aimed at stopping the sites from charging to remove arrest photos. Lawmakers in California are considering a similar proposal.

But efforts to rein in the sites have been complicated by questions about whether the attempts infringe on First Amendment rights and the difficulty of tracking down who owns the sites, some of which claim to originate from outside the country.

Some operators say they're performing a public service by providing information about arrest records that can be found by parents and neighbours without searching through court records.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Experts. Our dropping currency leads to dropping more loonies at home

As the Canadian dollar falls to its lowest level in more than three years this week, many are wondering how much further it has to go.

With most currency experts forecasting that the dollar will continue to decline over the next several months, perhaps falling to as low as 90 cents US this year, many say a lower loonie will be a boon for Canadian business.

"Something like this will always be good for Canadian businesses whether they acknowledge it or not," said Ambarish Chandra, a business professor at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto.

"When the loonie is weak, it makes foreign firms and prices appear more expensive and naturally domestic firms will always benefit."

A weaker Canadian dollar will ultimately lead to more consumers spending their money at home, rather than across the border. For instance, shopping trips to the U.S. as well as online purchases made from American companies will start to look less lucrative for Canadian shoppers if the loonie continues to drop.

Experts say there's an upside to our dropping dollar. THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE

THE CANADIAN PRESS

What are you, a mind reader? Well, yes

International Consumer Electronics Show attendees experiment with the Muse brain sensing headband Wednesday in Las Vegas. The headband measures brain activity, which the user can see on a mobile device to help manage stress and different emotional states of mind. JULIE JACOBSON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Going somewhere warm? Soon you can see all sides of a hotel before booking

Google is expanding its hotel business, offering several new ways for travellers to learn about accommodations.

The most noticeable change will be the introduction of a series of high-resolution panoramic photos that are stitched together to create a 360-degree experience, similar to that found in the Street View feature in Google maps. These aren't independent photos but they are another resource for travellers.

Best Western is rolling out photos of its 2,200 North American properties and hopes to have all online by the end of the year. Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group said it is also working with Google to get photos up of 100 of its Radisson and Country Inns & Suites hotels across the U.S. and Canada. Carlson said photos will include the lobby, bars, restaurants and guest rooms. Where applicable, guests are able to tour conference and meeting areas as well as the swimming pool.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Facebook losing Canadian fans

Thumbs down.

We are not all liking the social media network these days, survey finds

Facebook may be the world's biggest social network, and particularly popular in Canada, but there are still plenty of Canadian holdouts who refuse to join or have logged off permanently, suggests recently released research.

One in three Canadian Internet users told pollsters that they did not use Facebook in the previous month, according to a report by the Media Technology Monitor, based on telephone surveys with more than 4,000 Canadians last spring.

Of them, 14 per cent said they used to have a Facebook account but quit.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Not following

When poll respondents were asked why they quit Facebook, the most common response was they didn't find the site useful, followed by privacy concerns and a lack of time to engage with the site.

Canadians are not giving Facebook a thumbs up lately. GETTY IMAGES FILE

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Seeks court approval

Mobilicity wants to include wireless licences in its sale

Financially struggling Mobilicity wants court approval to include its valuable wireless licences in any sale.

Mobilicity paid the federal government $243 million for its wireless spectrum in 2008 and the ban on its sale to major carriers expires next month.

But Industry Canada has twice denied Telus its request to buy Mobilicity, which has been operating under creditor protection since last fall.

Ottawa's concern is that a purchase by the major carriers, including Telus, Rogers, or Bell, will decrease competition.

Toronto-based Mobilicity says without court approval to include its wireless licences, it's difficult to negotiate the value of a sale.

Mobilicity's sale is being supervised by the Ontario Superior Court of Justice and the carrier says the court has the power to include its spectrum licences in a sale.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Market Minute

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TSX 13,614.63 (+17.70)

OIL $92.33 US (-$1.34)

GOLD $1,225.50 US (-$4.10)

Natural gas: $4.19 US (-$0.14)
Dow Jones: 16,462.74 (-68.20)

OWN THE IRRATIONAL REACTION

HE SAYS

John Mazerolle
metronews.ca

It's almost time for the Olympics, which for many people is the only time they care about sports aside from hilarious ball-to-the-groin videos on YouTube.

That means some of you might have felt adrift this week as Canada announced its Olympic hockey team, an event that left hockey fans buzzing like my 20-year-old fridge.

Everyone likes to cheer for their country, but if you're not obsessed with hockey the rest of the time, than joining the heated conversations at home and the workplace can be tricky.

To help, I've compiled this primer for newbie Olympic hockey watchers about what they should say during the tournament to blend right in:

What to say during Olympic hockey:

The No. 1 rule to remember is that there can be no rational analysis of a world hockey tournament.

Canadian hockey history is rife with late, one-goal victories that somehow taught us that Canada is an unstoppable, dominant force in world hockey. It's also replete with shootout losses and other hard-fought defeats that taught us our national hockey program is a disaster that must be burned to the ground.

There is no middle ground, even if the outcome of the game came down to random chance.

Remember this when the games start. You might feel nervous about complicated discussions about matchups, statistics, etc., but those are just a smokescreen of facts that hide the three irrational pillars of hockey discussion: momentum, heart and clutch.

These might sound like intangible nonsense that would be impossible to measure or even ascertain, but shut up.

Wrong: "These are two evenly matched teams and there is no discernible momentum."

Right: Whichever team has most recently scored "has all the momentum."

Wrong: "It's overtime, so it's going to come down to random chance as two teams give it their all."

Right: "It's overtime, so it's going to come down to which team has the most heart."

Wrong: "I bet Sidney Crosby wins it because the highest scoring player is the player most likely to score now too."

Right: "I bet Sidney Crosby wins it because he's so clutch."

And that's how to speak like a true hockey fan.

One last lesson: If you come across a newspaper columnist or other unpatriotic liberal who questions any of these truisms, your surefire response is to say, "Clearly you've never played the game," and then walk away. With that sort of momentum, you could be a TV hockey commentator in no time.

Assuming, of course, that you're clutch.

ZOOM

Dark clouds hanging overhead

ULET IFANSASTI/GETTY IMAGES

Volcano erupts in Indonesia, again

Mount Sinabung spews pyroclastic smoke, seen from Sibintun village on Wednesday in Karo District, North Sumatra, Indonesia.

The number of displaced people has increased to 22,000 in Western Indonesia as Mount Sinabung continues to spew ash and smoke after several eruptions since September. Eleven deaths have now been recorded as a result of the eruptions, with hundreds more falling ill. Officials expect the number of evacuees to rise as volcanic activity remains high.

Sinabung had lain dormant for 400 years before a re-awakening eruption in 2010. Sinabung is one of nearly 130 active volcanoes in Indonesia that straddle key tectonic fault lines known as the Pacific Ring of Fire.

The deadliest eruption in recent years was of Mount Merapi in 2010 near the densely populated city of Yogyakarta, which killed 350 people.

GETTY IMAGES

A man wears a plastic bag to cover his head after his village was smothered by ash. GETTY IMAGES

Clickbait

HANNAH ZITNER
hannah.zitner@metronews.ca

Health, wellness and wearable tech are colliding in full force at this year's Consumer Electronic Show, with a healthy portion of products geared toward the digitally-inclined fitness diehards. Look out Fitbit and FuelBand, there are some new kids on the starting block.

CONTRIBUTED

Skulpt Aim:

Knowing how many clicks you've run and calories you've burned is just part of the health equation. Knowing the effects of your hard work is the other. Press this phone-size gadget to your freshly pumped muscles to get an instant (and accurate, they say) reading of your body composition.

Tinke:

Again, for those beyond measuring simple kms and cals, Tinke reads heart rate, blood oxygen levels and respiratory rate with just the tap of your thumb (accuracy may be questionable on this one).

Bracelets:

LG, Sony, Razer and even Intel have launched fitness tracking bracelets, all taking various metrics of your activities which connect to varying degrees with your smartphone.

Twitter

@metropicks asked: @jimmykimmel dumped snow on L.A. beach goers who bragged about the warm climate. What is a suitable penalty for bragging?

@yelpcalgary: Ha. Californians are just jealous of our awesome touques.

@ehbsea: One hour in a walk in freezer in their beach wear

@adam_rizk: A big enough star he could've had a following to Sequoia, Yosemite mountains & left them there LYAO!

@sarahmeaghang: They should have gotten "face-washes"

Follow @metropicks and take part in our daily poll.

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SCENE 2

Theatre Naught takes on Chekhov in modernized Cherry Orchard

Tougher than Shakespeare.
Stage veterans work with newer actors as part of Live Five's theatrical season

BACKSTAGE PASS
Simon Hiatt
saskatoon@metronews.ca

Theatre Naught was designed with the idea of giving less-experienced actors a chance to learn from some of Saskatoon's stage veterans.

But if the newcomers thought the old pros would take it easy on them, they were in for a surprise.

"The reason we're doing it is because it's challenging. We're not going to access plays that are simplistic in nature," said long-time Saskatoon actor Kent Allen.

After tackling King Lear last year for their first production, this time around the group is taking on The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov as part of Live Five's season.

The plot focuses on an aristocratic family facing the potential loss of their estate.

Director Philip Adams says he has wanted to put this play on for some time. While it's well known among theatre fans and scholars, it isn't one that is often staged, which could have something to do with the nature of the material.

"Chekhov is particularly challenging because his work is so subtle and the latitude for error is even smaller than in Shakespeare," Adams said. "So the pressure is on everyone to get it right."

Allen, who was a driving force in launching Theatre Naught, says both the experienced actors and those who are newer to the stage have been rising to the challenge.

"In a piece like this everyone has to do the work, dig deeply, and we'll all benefit," he says. "Hopefully (Theatre Naught) will continue so that we can move upwards and onwards."

Allen admits he has some selfish reasons for wanting to help inexperienced actors hone their craft; he wants to help ensure there is quality theatre to attend in the city for years to come.

"The energy in this city right now for the performing arts is very exciting and we had to take advantage of that somehow. So we thought rather than waiting for work to arrive, let's go make our own, and involve as many people as we can, and hopefully it will help to anchor some of these individuals here in our community."

The play runs this weekend and Jan. 16 to 19 at the Refinery (see livefive.ca for a link to buy tickets). With limited stage space in the small performance area and a cast that numbers 13, the director has also been dealing with his own obstacles.

"We have to be very efficient; I've told the actors that everything they do will be seen by somebody. So you can't just stand there thinking about popcorn. You have to be listening and focused," Adams said.

Quoted

"In a piece like this everyone has to do the work, dig deeply, and we'll all benefit. Hopefully (Theatre Naught) will continue so that we can move upwards and onwards."
Actor Kent Allen

Rob van Meenen and Kent Allen star in The Cherry Orchard, playing at the Refinery. CONTRIBUTED

A modern take on a classic

- The Cherry Orchard was Anton Chekhov's final play and although it was written 110 years ago, director Philip Adams believes the subject matter is more relevant than ever.
- "That's why we're placing it in the near future, because it's very similar to what's going on right now," said Adams. "People are losing their houses, there are foreclosures, the characters are spending money they just don't have."

Laura Vandervoort plays werewolf Elena Michaels in Bitten. CONTRIBUTED

Bitten star sinks her teeth into female werewolf role

Laura Vandervoort. Actress talks about the nuances of a role traditionally reserved for men

Werewolves have been howling loudly at the spotlight in recent years through various films and TV series — Twilight, True Blood and The Mortal Instruments to name but a few.

But the sexy new supernatural thriller Bitten offers a rarely seen take on the moon monster mythology: a furry female lead.

The werewolf figure is well suited to women because both are "so affected by mother Earth and the cycles" and face societal pressures concerning image, says Laura Vandervoort, the Toronto native who stars as the four-legged fanged protagonist Elena Michaels.

"(Elena is) suppressing this animal inside of her and trying to just maintain this perfect facade, whereas her true self is in New York as this werewolf and just letting loose, and I think a lot of women have trouble being themselves," she said in a recent telephone interview.

"So it's interesting if you think about it from that perspective while watching it, that she's trying to keep this perfect image."

Vandervoort's Elena is an orphan who grew up in the foster care system in the U.S. and became a werewolf when a professor with whom she fell in love (Greyston Holt) bit her to protect her.

In the series premiere, she's working as a photographer in Toronto and trying to carry on a new life away from her wolf pack in upstate New York.

She gets sucked back into life with the pack, though, when a "random mutt" breaks the rules by killing humans for sport and her strong tracking skills are needed to catch the culprit.

Watch it

Bitten premiers Saturday at 9 p.m. ET on Space in Canada. The series is based on the New York Times bestselling Women of the Otherworld novels by Canadian Kelley Armstrong.

Co-stars include Greg Bryk as pack head Jeremy, Paul Greene as Elena's unsuspecting boyfriend Philip and Michael Xavier as Elena's therapist and fellow pack member Logan.

"It's very Sopranos, True Blood," said Vandervoort, who grew up in Toronto's North York area and is the third cousin of acting great Gordon Pinsent.

"It's an adult show and it's about the relationships and not just the fact that we're werewolves. It's the family dynamic.

"It's protecting your family at all costs. And if that means murder, as much as Elena hates who she is, you protect your pack."

The Los Angeles-based Vandervoort, who's twice made Maxim's list of Top 100 hottest women, came to the series after playing key roles on series including the Instant Star, Smallville and V.

With a second-degree black belt in Shotokan karate, she did "93 per cent" of her own stunts "except falling down the stairs."

"It's such a vast range for a female to get to play on television that I loved going to work every day and coming home and being exhausted but feeling like, 'Wow, I did that and I didn't think I was capable.'" THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Selena Gomez ALL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

Gomez thought to be back in Bieber's arms after devastating diagnosis

Just why are Selena Gomez and Justin Bieber back to canoodling? Sources say it's because of Gomez's recent lupus diagnosis. "Justin reached out to Selena after she cancelled the tour," a Bieber insider tells Life & Style, referring to Gomez cancelling her 2014 Stars Dance tour last month, reportedly after she got the diagnosis of the autoimmune disease. "He wanted to make sure she was OK and healthy. He cares about her a lot. I don't know if they'll get back together, but he wanted to see her and spend time with her."

Alexander Skarsgard

Ever heard of frost bite? Skarsgard celebrates South Pole challenge in the nude

Alexander Skarsgard knew exactly how to celebrate reaching the South Pole as part of his Walking with the Wounded Challenge across Antarctica: getting naked. Fellow trekker Inge Solheim posted a photo to Instagram of the actor wearing nothing but a pair of snow boots and sunglasses, perched on an outdoor toilet in the middle of the snowy landscape, the temperature reportedly a brisk -30 C. Coincidentally, the shot echoes Skarsgard's full-frontal appearance at the end of the True Blood sixth season finale, only the TV version didn't feature a toilet.

METRO DISH

OUR TAKE ON THE WORLD OF CELEBRITIES

The Word

Paul's got some party haul but this one was a real thriller

Aaron Paul has been to some impressive parties, but one sticks out particularly for the Breaking Bad star. "It was the Prince of Brunei's 25th birthday party. Six years ago, outside of London," he tells Details magazine. Paul, who attended as another guest's plus-one, entertained himself by chasing sheep around the castle and breaking the Prince's hovercraft. He certainly made an impression: "I was going back up to my room, and this guy grabs me and says, 'Hey, Prince Azim wants to see you in the library,'" Paul says. "So I go down there, and he's sitting on the couch with Michael Jackson, and me and Michael Jackson end up having this hour-long heart-to-heart about family and upbringings, and I remember, he just put his arm around my shoulder and said, 'You know, if you've had a rough childhood or not, it's all about forgiveness. Once you realize that, it's fine. Everything's fine.' And I'm like, 'Michael, you are absolutely right. Do you want to do a shot?' And he goes 'Sure!'"

Sarah Jessica Parker

SJP wants Sex and the City one last time

Sarah Jessica Parker is holding out hope for at least one more big-screen adventure for the Sex and the City girls, despite the poor performance of the second installment. "A part of me thinks there is one last chapter to tell," she tells InStyle magazine. "But timing is a peculiar thing. It isn't a decision that can wait forever. I don't want to have to wear muumuus." Last month, co-star Kristin Davis admitted that "there is discussion" about a third film among the powers that be, though Cynthia Nixon was much less optimistic, telling the Hollywood Reporter, "I think it's fine to let it go."

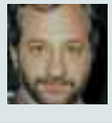
Jake Gyllenhaal

Gyllenhaal's relationship with model 'fizzled out'

Jake Gyllenhaal has reportedly split up with model Alyssa Miller after six months of dating, according to Us Weekly. "They fizzled out. It happened a while back — before the holidays. He's back on the scene," a source says. "Things were really good between Jake and Alyssa right up until he had to leave for L.A. to shoot a movie in the fall. Then the distance just really got to them." Reps for Gyllenhaal and Miller did not respond to requests for comment.

Twitter

@kirstiealley
When someone says "It isn't you, it's me"....It's you



@JuddApatow
How do I avoid this freaking stomach flu? I am not a big fan of multiple days of vomiting.

@MarkDuplass
Milquetoast. Great word. Underutilized.

Every sharp shopper has a calendar in the closet

Seasonal secrets. Style expert Lilliana Vazquez shares tips on mapping out your 2014 shopping plan

ANDREA PARK
Metro World News

There is a right time and a wrong time to buy those shoes you've been eyeing, and even if you made a New Year's resolution to save money in 2014, that doesn't mean you have to sacrifice style. Lilliana Vazquez, style expert and author of The Cheap Chica's Guide to Style, shares her tips on planning a shopping schedule for the year and how you can save money on hot wardrobe staples with just a bit of good timing.

January

Winter coats and accessories
This frosty month is the perfect time to buy warm winter goods. "Whether it's a brand new coat, hats, scarves, gloves, boots or ski stuff, items get really marked down in January but in a city like New York, we'll probably still be wearing these until April," says Vazquez.

Formal wear
"Anyone who was selling New Year's and holiday party stuff still has a lot of merchandise, so this is the best time of the year to buy a cocktail dress," says Vazquez. She added that it's an especially great time to save on anything sparkly or beaded.

February

Spring items
Believe it or not, February is a great month to buy spring items. Vazquez says though this is when stores get their first shipments of spring clothes, retailers will mark them down if no one is buying. "You can get new stuff marked down if it's really cold out," Vazquez says.

Winter clearance
If you still need winter clothes, this is when winter gear is on final mark down. The merchandise will already be picked over, but it will be at its cheapest.

March and April

Shoes
Get a head start on summer shoe shopping in March and April, when the selection is the largest. Stores will offer some early markdowns, and those sandals you've had your eye on may be gone by May.

Fitness gear
"A lot of (sneakers and fitness items) come in for the New Year's resolutions of people who say they're going to work out and then never do, so if you're a runner or gearing up for the summer, it's a great time to buy sneakers and fitness fashion items," says Vazquez. She added that this is when Lululemon fans can buy their favourite brand on deep discount.

May

Secondhand items
May is a big month for spring cleaning, which means that lots of people are getting rid of their clothes and accessories, and one man's trash is another man's treasure, right? "A lot of people are cleaning out, so it's a good time to deal hunt in your neighbourhood," says Vazquez. "You can get vintage stuff and great shoes because they're making room in their closets for all new things."

Lilliana Vazquez, author of The Cheap Chica's Guide to Style. GETTY IMAGES

June and July

Summer items
Fall items will be trickling into stores by now, which means you can find great deals on summer clothes and accessories. "You can get stuff you can get a lot of use out of, like shorts, rompers and sundresses — things that feel seasonal," says Vazquez.

Swimsuits
Stores will still carry plenty of swimsuits, but they'll be marked down by June and July. "You'll still wear them for another two or three months," pointed out Vazquez.

Thinking ahead

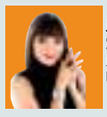
- **Summer's end** Vazquez called this "back-to-school summer leftover time." Inventory will be a mixed bag of summer odds and ends without much size availability, but this is when you can get the best deals on summer clearance items. Plus, you'll find discounts on new inventory during back-to-school and Labour Day promotions.
- **Baby, it's cold outside** November is a big shopping month with Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Vazquez says this is when she saves up for her big, pricey purchases like cashmere sweaters. "These deals I only splurge on once a year because I can wear them for a long time, so it's a great value proposition for my closet," she says.

December's diamonds
Vazquez says that December is the last chance for retailers to grab customers for their year-end earnings reports, which means holiday sales abound. This is an especially good time to get "no size" gifts like hats, bags, gloves and scarves for friends and family.

Leap on that LBD ASAP!

> "Anyone who was selling New Year's and holiday party stuff still has a lot of merchandise, so this is the best time of the year to buy a cocktail dress."
> Lilliana Vazquez

Twitter



JEANNE SPACE
Jeanne Beker
life@metronews.ca

TWITTER HAS BECOME A COOL AND SUCCINCT WAY OF COMMUNICATING. IT ALLOWS ME TO BE ACCESSIBLE, INSTANTLY SPEAK MY MIND AND CONNECTS ME WITH ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE. WHETHER IT'S A FASHION QUESTION OR YOU JUST WANT TO COMMENT ON LIFE'S BIGGER PICTURE, I'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU.

OMG! A little late for #TBT but look at this pic my sister just me: Moi, circa early '70s

Here's one more for #FlashbackFriday My mom made me this "jungle print" jumpsuit circa 1968 pic

Canadian street style

Spotted in: Toronto

Name: Lexi

Age: 27

Occupation: Special event coordinator

What she's wearing : Gift of Love knit scarf, vintage Bridge and Bardot plaid shirt, Zara blouse, American Apparel tights, Jeffrey Campbell booties.

Her inspiration : "I have always gravitated toward bohemian-style clothing. However, the truth is the majority of my closet is from vintage thrift stores. I love digging for old classic pieces that tell stories and bring a little 'umph' to the outfit. I am also a huge fan of comfort and free frolicking. Therefore, if I can't bend and snap in a piece of clothing, I will not buy."

THE KIT IS A MULTI-PLATFORM BEAUTY AND FASHION BRAND WHICH INCLUDES AN INTERACTIVE MAGAZINE AND DYNAMIC APP, A WEBSITE, KIT CHAT — AN E-NEWSLETTER PROGRAM — AND A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER SECTION TOO!

Print yourself some new furnishings

Technology. A novelty once reserved for sci fi, 3-D printing has now gone mainstream

Looking for that perfect light for your home office? A new chair or coffee table? You might try making it yourself, at home, with just the click of a button.

3-D printing, a novelty once reserved for science fiction, is going mainstream thanks to cheaper, more accessible technology.

The printers, which now cost as little as $300, use lasers to blast out layer upon layer of plastics or other materials, forming 3-D objects.

And if you don't have the time, money or inclination to invest in a 3-D printer of your own, there are hundreds of websites selling lights, coasters, sculptures, furniture and even wallpaper crafted by 3-D printers.

New York-based Shapeways, for example, allows users to make, buy or sell three-dimensional designs. Products include a delicate, twig-like egg cup for $8 and a lamp that looks like a nuclear mushroom cloud for $1,389.

Lighting

Among the most popular — and dramatic — 3-D products for the home are lights, whether ceiling pendants, table lamps or floor lamps.

Belgium's .MGX by Materialise, a pioneer in 3-D printing, is known for museum-quality, futuristic designs. Among the most popular is the Bloom table lamp (about $2,600 US), a flower-bud inspired design with joints that you can expand or collapse to release or contain light, says marketing manager Katrien Vandenplas.

Shapeways offers dozens of lamps created by some of the site's more than 11,000 "shop owners," or designers. The honeycomb-inspired Veroni lampshade, for instance, costs as little as $15 US and comes in a variety of colours and materials ranging from the standard plastic to raw metal and steel.

Wall hangings

Statement pieces for your walls run the gamut in the 3-D printing world.

Shapeways' ethereal Whales ($48) lends modern sophistication with its airy rendition of two swimming whales crafted from white plastic. They almost seem to spring off the wall.

Florida-based Proton 3D Studio offers a little kitsch with a pop art-like plastic Pi symbol ($21) and the word "geek" crafted in orange plastic script lettering ($24).

Sweden's Kredema Design has one of the more off-the-wall home-decor products: 3-D wallpaper that rolls out away from the wall to form shelves, magazine holders and even lampshades. Made from sheets of acrylic and wallpaper, the Off the Wall collection is available by special order only.

These photos show products from .MGX, the design division of Belgium-based 3-D printing company Materialise. Above, a Fractal.MGX coffee table by WertelOberfell, made from brown epoxy resin, was designed to echo the growth patterns of trees. MGX BY MATERIALISE

Accessories

From picture frames to vases and even planters, you can design or find just about anything home-related using 3-D printing technology.

Shapeways recently added glazed ceramic to its list of materials, making it possible to craft personalized plates, mugs, salt and pepper shakers, and other items for the table.

Blogger and tech consultant Michael Sitver designed some personalized coasters in about 90 minutes using 3-D CAD software called Autodesk Inventor. He printed them up at Shapeways' website.

"This is a great project for beginners," says Sitver, of Weston, Conn., "because designing it doesn't take too much work, but it helps beginners get acquainted with the tools involved and the process."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Volume.MGX lamp by Dror expands from a flattened position to create a shape which, when lit, provides both a bright, warm glow in its centre and a cooler, darker feeling around its edges.

Online sources

- **Shapeways:** shapeways.com
- **.MGX by Materialise:** mgxbymaterialise.com
- **ProtoParadigm:** protoparadigm.com
- **Proton3D Studio:** etsy.com/ca/shop/proton3D
- **Kredema Off the Wall:** kredema.se/offthewall

Big, bold design trends for the new year

This year brings big changes on the home decor front. We'll say goodbye to espresso wood and cool grey colours while welcoming lighter woods, warmer walls and coloured, artful rugs. These trends will hold strong for a few years, so keep them in mind for future decorating projects. Here are four key ones worth investing in over the next year and beyond.

DESIGN CENTRE
Karl Lohnes
home@metronews.ca

Lighter wood tones

Goodbye dark espresso wood tones and hello lighter, natural oak. No, not the honey-golden oak from the '80s: think grainy, raw oak with a simple coat of wax. Pagan's Dance brushed, engineered wide plank flooring, $13.75 per square foot, kentwoodfloors.com.

Warmer paint colours

The new neutral is platinum. Think grey with a dollop of brown to warm it up. Looks great with almost every other colour. Escarpment CC-518, benjaminmoore.ca.

Bolder, artful rugs

Go bold or don't bring it home. Art and rugs are going big and bold. It's time to wake up our spaces, so think of colourful rugs as artwork for the floor. Kashmir 8x10 orange wool rug, $363, ecarpetgallery.com.

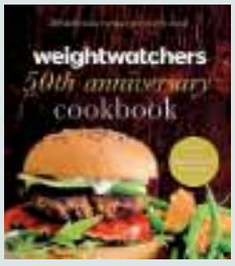
Golden metal finishes

Metal tones are warming up, so go with polished gold for a luxe vibe or tarnished brass for a casual, industrial look. Graham Table Lamp, $338, crateandbarrel.ca.

Southern classic, without the fat

Cookbook of the Week

Get excited about eating healthy



Weight Watchers cookbooks are trusted by anyone who is excited about cooking delicious, healthy food.

This latest offering serves up more than 280 favourites that have been updated, and feature fresh ingredients, how-to tips, Weight Watchers lore, and nutritional info and PointsPlus values for the newest program, Weight Watchers 360°. **METRO**

"Pork chops in onion sauce is a Southern classic, but often it is swimming in too much fat," write the Weight Watchers folks in the book Weight Watchers 50th Anniversary Cookbook of this Skillet Pork Chops with Onion Gravy recipe. "We gave the dish a healthy makeover that retains all the great flavour but with a mere one teaspoon of oil. Think of it as comfort food that you can really feel comfortable with!"

Ingredients

- 4 (6-oz) bone-in porkloin chops, trimmed
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp ground pepper
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 2 sweet onions, thinly sliced
- 1 1/4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tsp all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp whole-grain Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh thyme

1. Sprinkle the chops with the salt and pepper. Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Swirl in the oil, add the chops and cook, turning occasionally, until browned, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate.

2. Add the onions, 1/4 cup of the broth, and the garlic to the skillet. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until the onions are very tender, 12–15 minutes.

3. Sprinkle the onions with the flour; cook, stirring constantly, 1 minute. Add the remaining 1 cup broth, mustard, and thyme. Bring to a boil, stirring until the sauce bubbles and thickens. Return the chops and any accumulated juices to the skillet. Reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, until the chops are heated through, 2–3 minutes. **FOR MORE WEIGHT WATCHERS RECIPES, PLEASE VISIT WEIGHTWATCHERS.CA/FOOD. RECIPES AND PHOTOS REPRINTED FROM WEIGHT WATCHERS 50TH ANNIVERSARY COOKBOOK © 2013 WEIGHT WATCHERS INTERNATIONAL, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.**

This recipe serves six. One chop with 1/4 cup sauce contains 253 calories and 11 grams total fat.

Lunch. Southwestern Chicken-Vegetable Soup

This recipe serves four. One and 1/4 cups of soup with three tortilla chips contains 142 calories and three grams total fat.

1. Combine broth, vegetables, tomatoes, chili powder, and cumin in a saucepan. Bring to a boil; reduce the heat and simmer, covered, until the vegetables are tender, 10 minutes.

2. Stir in the chicken and cook until heated through, 2 minutes. Stir in the cilantro and lime juice. Top each serving with 3 of the tortilla chips.

Ingredients

- 3 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 2 cups frozen mixed vegetables
- 1 (14 1/2-oz) can diced tomatoes
- 2 tsp chili powder
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 cup chopped skinless cooked chicken breast
- 3 tbsp chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tbsp fresh lime juice
- 12 baked tortilla chips, crumbled

For your phone

The Biscuit Baker (iPad; $1.99)

MIND THE APP
Kris Abel
@RealKrisAbel
life@metronews.ca

Complement your dog's diet with some homemade treats. These 25 recipes offer up biscuits flavoured with beef stew, chicken pie and apple bacon. Check with your vet before you bake.

Manuel Osborne-Paradis will anchor Canada's men's alpine team in Sochi. NATHAN DENETTE/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Sochi Games won't be their first rodeo

Canadian Cowboys. Veteran skiers Hudec, Osborne-Paradis, Guay back in Olympic saddle after fixing 'all the bugs and the kinks'

Canadian skier Manuel Osborne-Paradis learned how it felt to compete on the sport's biggest stage during his Olympic debut in Turin eight years ago.

He learned about pressure and expectations at the 2010 Games in his hometown of Vancouver.

His next mission is to build on that experience at his next Olympic appearance in Sochi, where he plans to ride the momentum from the team's strong start to the season.

"In Vancouver there was a lot of prep but not very directed prep," he said Wednesday. "I think this year we've really fixed all the bugs and the kinks that we felt in Vancouver. Obviously there's not as much pressure, not being in Canada and being as far away (from) Canada as pretty much possible.

"I think the nerves are a lot more settled and hopefully we're able to direct the energy down the hill and not towards the media."

The veteran skier will anchor the men's alpine team at the Games along with Erik Guay of Mont-Tremblant, Que., and Calgary's Jan Hudec. The three "Canadian Cowboys" were officially nominated to the Sochi 2014 Olympic team Wednesday.

Some of their teammates still have a chance to join them in Sochi. The qualification window is open until Jan. 26 and the roster is expected to be finalized the next day.

Guay had the top Canadian result at the Vancouver Games, finishing fifth in the downhill and the super-G. Osborne-Paradis was 17th in the downhill and didn't finish the super-G, while Hudec didn't crack the top 20 in either discipline.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

'The right decision'

Vonn praised for skipping Olympics

The head coach of the U.S. women's ski team has praised Lindsey Vonn for making the "very hard decision" of skipping the Sochi Olympics in February because of her injured right knee.

"There was too much risk and she realized that and made the right decision," Alex Hoedlmoser said. "It was a very smart decision from her to actually do this step now."

Vonn announced Tuesday she would miss the Olympics after "the reality has sunk in that my knee is just too unstable to compete at this level."

The 2010 Olympic downhill champion underwent surgery to reconstruct two knee ligaments following a crash 11 months ago. The 29-year-old American tore one of those ligaments again in November then hurt her knee again in December. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

UCI

Independent panel looking into doping allegations

A three-man independent panel will investigate cycling's doping past, including allegations the sport's governing body colluded with Lance Armstrong.

UCI president Brian Cookson said Wednesday the commission will investigate allegations "that the UCI has been involved in wrongdoing in the past — allegations which have done so much to hurt the credibility of the UCI and our sport."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Blades' Connor Sanvido, who was acquired on New Year's Day from Swift Current, takes a shot against the Hitmen at Credit Union Centre Wednesday night. SIMON HIATT/FOR METRO

Hitmen take edge off Blades

The Saskatoon Blades looked like a different team in more ways than one Wednesday night.

Hours after dealing team captain Graeme Craig to the Prince Albert Raiders, the Blades played well against the Eastern Conference's best team, before falling 6-4 to Calgary.

Fans barely had a chance to take their seats before Nikita Scherbak recorded his 23rd goal of the season unassisted just 29 seconds into the game to give Saskatoon a 1-0 lead.

The Hitmen tied it up midway through the period as Brady Brassart scored on the power play for his 18th goal of the year, beating Troy Trombley.

Playing down a man, Saskatoon took the lead back 30 seconds later as Ryan Graham ended a drought with his first goal since Oct. 25.

Brett Stovin padded the lead for the Blades at the 16:13 mark in the second period, but Calgary would claw back within one just 36 seconds later as Zane Jones scored his 11th.

After picking up assists on the first two Calgary goals, the newest member of the Hitmen, Adam Tambellini, tied it up with his first WHL goal.

Scherbak started the third period the same way he started the first with a goal that beat Mack Shields 1:15 in to give the Blades a 4-3 lead.

Calgary tied it up once again when Jake Virtanen batted the puck out of the air for his 24th goal of the year and then 17 seconds later he added his 25th to give the Hitmen their first lead of the evening at 5-4. Pavel Padakin added a late empty-netter.

SIMON HIATT/FOR METRO

Horoscopes

♈ Aries
March 21 - April 20
You will gain more by doing less today. Cut back on your workload or get friends to help you out. Better still, do both. There's no cosmic law that says you have to do anything at all.

♉ Taurus
April 21 - May 21
You will be inspired to give your best over the next 24 hours. Hold on to that positive, can-do attitude as long as you can — ideally until the moon is full seven days from now.

♊ Gemini
May 22 - June 21
Today you will know what is right and wrong, and which course of action you should be taking. If you choose not to take it, the consequences may not be to your liking.

♋ Cancer
June 22 - July 23
If someone whose judgment you trust urges you to really go for it today, you must act immediately. Too often in the past you have been too careful and missed out — now go to the other extreme and throw caution to the wind.

♌ Leo
July 24 - Aug. 23
It's a good day romance and if anyone is of the opinion that you lack passion, they will soon see the error of their ways. When a Leo gets fired up, the heat is enough to melt the coldest of hearts.

♍ Virgo
Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
You are enamored more by things than you are by people at the moment. There's nothing wrong with that but take care that your material desires don't detract from your relationships.

♎ Libra
Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
If you think all things are possible, you're right. But why make a battle of it when you have the charm to get what you want without a struggle? Or is that what you enjoy?

♏ Scorpio
Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Let others know what you are willing to put up with and what will happen if they push their luck too far. There are times to be tactful but this isn't one of them. Be bold and, if necessary, be brutal too.

♐ Sagittarius
Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Don't stay indoors and hide away. Get out into the world and show everyone what star quality looks like. You were born to be larger than life, so why are you peeking out from behind the curtains?

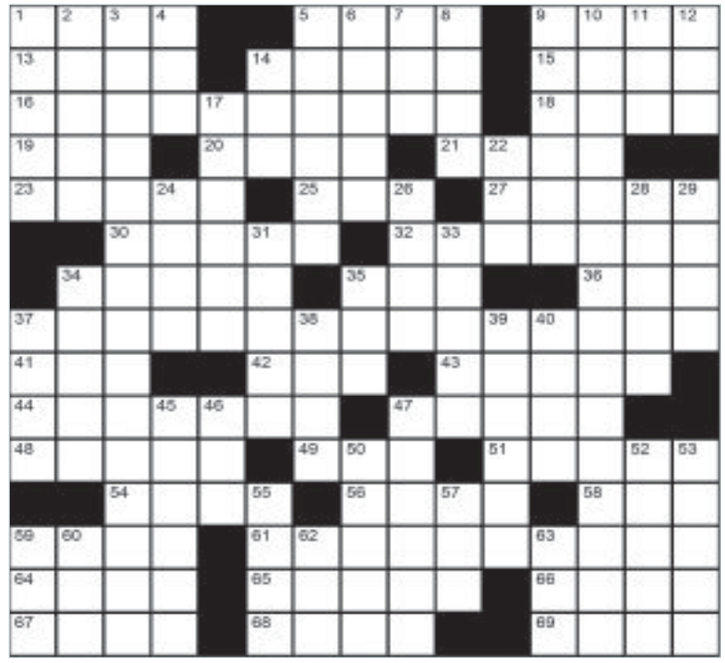
♑ Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
If you've fallen out with someone, it is the time to make up. That applies to all kinds of relationships but mainly to those of a personal nature.

♒ Aquarius
Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
You may think you can do as you please at the moment but you are kidding yourself and today's events will bring that fact home to you sharply. There are forces operating behind the scenes that limit your options.

♓ Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
If someone wants to make a nuisance of themselves, let them. Most likely, they are hoping you will overreact. Treat them with the contempt they deserve — ignore them completely. SALLY BROMPTON

Crossword: Canada Across and Down

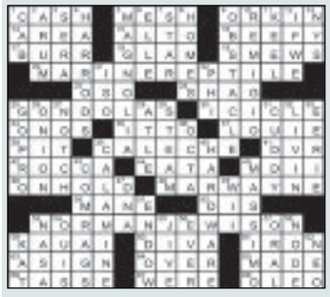
See today's answers at metronews.ca/answers.
BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



Across
1. ...seis, siete, __...
5. Margaret Mitchell's epic book of '36
9. Rabbit-style tail
13. Scorch
14. Medieval thigh armour, variantly
15. #5-Across home
16. It's currently underway in Russia: 2 wds.
18. AD = __ Domini
19. Oxygen
20. Robert Burns' 'old'
21. Money obligation
23. Mythological tree nymph
25. Type of rally
27. Get cut, do this
30. American poet Sylvia
32. Port __, BC
34. Russian river
35. Orlando's li'l state
36. Implore
37. Cultural attractions in Ottawa: 2 wds.
41. Meal scrap
42. '90s album: 'A Boy Named __'
43. Grocery section
44. Canadian actress Wendy
47. Outrageous interest rate
48. North or South country
49. Practically forever
51. Canadian measurement
54. Soaks flax
56. Bon Jovi's Mr. Torres
58. "Take on Me" band
59. Vancouver-born broadcaster, __-Yin Lee
61. Billboard toppers: 2 wds.
64. Pottery-firing furnace
65. Classic theatre
66. Give out
67. __ _'Orleans, Quebec
68. Get a paycheck
69. Ptolemy's pursuit, puny-ly

Down
1. Group of eight
2. Church singing group
3. It put Daniel Radcliffe on the map: 3 wds.
4. Legendary monster
5. 'G' of Ontario's U of G
6. Actress Olivia
7. Airport screening org.
8. Colin James' "__ You Lie"
9. Horsie's house
10. Chaucer's creation: 2 wds.
11. Vase
12. Philosophical principle
14. French vineyard
17. Attempted: 3 wds.
22. Shrink
24. U2's "__ _ Want Is You"
26. Warm climate tree
28. "__ of the State" (1998)
29. Makes ground holes
31. Sylvester Stallone/Kurt Russell movie, "__ & Cash" (1989)
33. Hails
34. Writer of ancient Rome, Marcus Terentius __
35. "And __, she don't know...": Bit of The Supremes' "Back in My Arms Again"
37. Arrow-to-bow-string groove
38. Five-star
39. Pink-fleshed fish, en francais
40. Emerald land
45. 'Kiss Land': Album by Canadian artist The __
46. Took a chair
47. Early Celine Dion song
50. CC-138 Twin __ (Search and Rescue aircraft of the RCAF)
52. #5-Across' leading man
53. Facilitator
55. Cobbler's fixed thing
57. NFL's Bengals, on scoreboards
59. Do alpine-ing
60. Pantry product
62. Ms. Lupino
63. "Today" rival, commonly

Yesterday's Crossword



Sudoku

How to play
Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved.

2		6	8		3	4		9
		9	2		5	7		
	7						6	
			5		7			
5								8
			3		2			
	9						3	
		3	6		4	8		
8		7	1		9	5		6

Yesterday's Sudoku

2	3	9	1	7	6	5	4	8
1	7	4	5	3	8	6	9	2
5	8	6	4	9	2	1	3	7
8	9	7	6	2	4	3	5	1
4	6	2	3	5	1	8	7	9
3	1	5	9	8	7	2	6	4
7	2	3	8	4	5	9	1	6
6	5	8	7	1	9	4	2	3
9	4	1	2	6	3	7	8	5

Today -8°/-11° Variable
Friday -7°/-12° Variable
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TWN incorporates MSC data

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